lt Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala
Bedouins M34

XXV

Honour among Thieves

AT DEYR-EZ-ZOR I was eventually able to arrange for the transfer of the young stallion to Egypt by way of Aleppo and Beyruth. It was a tremendous journey, as it had to be done on its own feet; but by slow stages the Arab, who accompanied the horse, succeeded in delivering him in good condition to my friends in Egypt.

Meanwhile Ali and I roamed further afield and rode to the pasture-grounds of the Fid'an, then camped at the northern foot of the Bishri Mountains, west of the Euphrates. There, also, the tent of Mijhem ibn Meheyd was pitched, and he received us hospitably. We spent several pleasant days with him.

He then led his tribe southwards into the Wudian area, east of the Hamad. We accompanied them through the Jabal Bishri and camped with them south of these hills. There I decided to say farewell to Ibn Meheyd, and bade Ali buy three especially strong *dhalul* (racing-camels) and two mares. With Ali alone, and these animals, I struck through the Hamad desert, to make my way to the Ruala and to Damascus. On the first day we fell in with a small caravan of four men with twenty-odd camels and six stallions.

From this combination alone (for Bedouins never ride stallions on a raid) it was clear they were peaceful travellers. In fact, they were *Akkeyl* or camel-traders from Inner Arabia, who had purchased camels and young

1: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala
Bedouins M34

443 stallions from various Bedouin tribes in the Euphrates. Their kind is found everywhere in Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Almost invariably the *Akhsyl* hail from Anayza and Buraida, two large oasis-towns of Kasim in the heart of Arabia.

[437] During spring they travel among the nomad Arabs and barter rice, coffee, sugar, arms, munitions, and gold [493 177] for camels and colts. Bedouins have only begun to sell mares since the arrival of the automobile, which has displaced the horse for raiding purposes.

These traders travel unmolested throughout Arabia and they pay the *sheykh* of the tribe from which they purchase animals a small sum for the privilege of pursuing their business. Each trader has his own special tribe which he visits every year.

721 On the second day, when we came on some rain water left in the rocky hollows of a *wadi*, we decided to rest awhile and let our mares drink their fill. We had hardly dismounted when two strange Bedouins on horseback suddenly appeared. Ali jumped on his mare's back at once, and deserting me and our animals, galloped away in the opposite direction from which the Bedouins had come, obviously seeking cover.

"A *ghazu!*" he yelled, as he rode away.

The two strange Bedouins were armed. They were obviously not traders, as Ali had immediately perceived. More horsemen appeared and they began to fire at Ali and myself. My "Powerful" protector, ducking low over [291] his horse's neck, made a comical picture. The hostile Bedouins were Fid'an, as I knew from their striped shepherd's cloaks. To defend ourselves was useless, as we

1 - [The Akhayl or camel and horse traders --Analyst]

1: Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait
Reference 1434

but when the strong hand is weakened or withdrawn, then merry hell is let loose, and every tribe is at its neighbour's throat. Such a period is what every tribe and every individual Badawin long to see. It means raiding and fun for everyone and wealth for him who is bold and strong. Not much killing or loss of life follows from this state of anarchy, but camels change hands frequently, and there is loot for all and exchange of worldly possessions. Since women are always safe under such conditions (see Chapter VII) the Badawin considers this state of affairs as nearly ideal as possible, and is for ever talking about the good times when anarchy prevailed. This is his idea of heaven on earth, this is what he perpetually longs for. Is it not his birthright that "every man's hand shall be against him, and his hand be against every man"?

If tribes and confederations are at peace with each other, the individuals and families move about at will in each other's territories, as they go and come to and from the various towns that supply their wants. This movement to market towns is known as *mushlilah* and exists all over Arabia. Each tribe has its special or favourite towns which it goes up to for its necessities, and it looks forward with joy to such visits. For instance, from time immemorial the Munir, Harb, Shammar, 'Awazim and Northern 'Ajman have done their *mushlilah* to Kuwait, while the Dhafir have visited Zubair, Nasriyah and Samawa on the Euphrates.

The system enables the town authorities to exercise a beneficial control over the Badawin who market with them, as any misbehaviour at once results in the tribe's being forbidden to enter the town—a very great hardship to the desert shopper. Despotic rulers like Ibn Sa'ud naturally do not like the *mushlilah* system at all, especially when it affects their border tribes, for these would like to spend their moneys outside the state, and are always liable to be got at by the powers that be, in neighbouring countries. One of the chief reasons for Ibn Sa'ud's ten-year blockade of Kuwait was his determination to try and prevent his subjects doing *mushlilah* with that town. The Ruler of the latter place naturally tried to encourage such *mushlilah*, for if it were forcibly stopped, his people must have recourse to smuggling to get their goods out to the tribes.